

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: April 10, 1952
2:30 P.M.

SUBJECT: Nationalism of the Middle East

PARTICIPANTS: Mr. D. A. Greenhill, First Secretary, British Embassy
Mr. John H. Ferguson, S/P
Mr. Philip Trezise, OIR
Mr. Henry Owen, OIRCOPIES TO: Mr. Burton Berry, NEA
Mr. G. Hayden Raynor, BNA
Messrs. Trezise/Owen, OIR

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR	
REVIEWED BY <u>VWOLFJR</u>	DATE <u>6/1/54</u>
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Recently, when Mr. Nitze was in London he was told by Sir William Strang of the Foreign Office that the Ministerial Committee which developed the British paper on relations with the U.S.S.R. was now working on a paper dealing with the problem of nationalism in the world. He asked Mr. Nitze whether we were undertaking any similar studies. Mr. Nitze told him we had done some work on nationalism in the Middle East in connection with some general papers we were preparing, but that we were not undertaking a separate study.

Several days ago Mr. Greenhill called Mr. Stabler of NEA to say that the Foreign Office had asked him to inquire whether we had made any further progress on the study of nationalism in the Middle East. At Mr. Nitze's suggestion, Mr. Greenhill was asked to come in and see Mr. Ferguson. The material prepared by S/P and OIR on nationalism in the Middle East for use in connection with the draft NSC paper on the Arab States and Israel (attached) was used as the basis of the conversation with Mr. Greenhill, and a copy of this material was handed to Mr. Greenhill, ~~which~~ was approved in the attached memorandum from Mr. Jones of NEA.

Mr. Greenhill was informed that the paper he was given was a working paper and had been used by S/P in connection with work on a number of more general problems; it was in no sense a formal governmental paper and that we were glad to make these ideas available.

Mr. Greenhill

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After Mr. Greenhill read the material there was a short discussion of the possibility of undertaking economic projects in the Middle East which would have specific political appeal for urban groups. Mr. Greenhill mentioned that when he was serving in Bulgaria he was impressed by the manner in which the Communists undertook large projects, such as irrigation development, and succeeded in using it very successfully in a political sense, even though a good deal of inefficiency and waste was involved and even though the program was not necessarily sound economically. He felt that it was necessary to undertake such projects in the Middle East in order to grasp the imagination of the local people, and he felt that we too often postponed doing anything until years of study and plans had been completed. He remarked that after the Clapp Report, which indicated that it would take a very long time to improve the general economic conditions of the Middle East, a number of Arabs had remarked to him that their countries would not wait forty years but would rush into things sooner, whatever the consequences.

After a few more general remarks, Mr. Greenhill concluded the conversation by saying he thought London would not be far from us in the thinking which was expressed in the memorandum.

S/P:JHFerguson:AVH

Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT *fw*

TO : S/P - Mr. Ferguson

DATE: April 9, 1952 *JK*FROM : NEA - Lewis Jones *J*

SUBJECT: Extract re Nationalization in the Arab States and Iran.

I have discussed the enclosed extract with Burton Berry and he agrees with me that no harm, and possibly some good would flow from making its contents available to the British Embassy. In both expression and content it seems to us that this is an admirable pen sketch of the political turmoil in the Arab states and Iran. We see no objection to your handing a copy to the British Embassy as a working paper.

OFFICE OF DIRECTOR

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Attachment:
As stated.

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S/P: JFym
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re Arab states

NATIONALISM IN THE ARAB STATES AND IRAN

The Arab States and Iran are in varying degrees experiencing deep and difficult changes as their relatively rigid social and economic institutions are compelled to adjust under the pressure of the forces released by the introduction of Western techniques and ideas, but without the stabilizing political and religious forces once dominant in the area. The impact of Western techniques and ideas has been most notable in its effect upon relations between the groups which comprise the political pyramid in most of these states.

At the apex of the political pyramid in the Arab States and Iran there has been a small ruling group. It is drawn largely from land-owners and tribal leaders, admixed with a smaller and not entirely separate merchant and financial class. Its group interest is the preservation of the status quo. With the passage of time, however, this group--which has traditionally been split within itself by contests for power--has become less and less capable of effective leadership. The traditional relationship of ruler to ruled in these countries has been under increasing challenge from Western ideas over a long period of time. Every adjustment, every minor concession

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concession by the rulers to that challenge has weakened its threads of control until now, as in Iran, the group may lack even the will to self-preservation.

Below the ruling group, as a distinctive political force, are the urban dwellers: disaffected intellectuals, barred from attaining status by the political monopoly of the ruling groups; students, unhappy with their prospects and contemptuous of political leadership that does not build a strong and dynamic state; and the small merchants, the artisans, the lower and middle levels of the bureaucracy, and the urban wage-earners. The outstanding characteristic of this urban group is dissatisfaction with things as they are. The relatively rigid and semi-feudal organization of society does not provide opportunities for the more capable and educated members of this group commensurate with the values they place on their capacities. This creates disaffection within a group at least partially fitted for leadership. Since most other elements of the urban group are also in some degree maladjusted to the social scheme, the materials for pressure on the ruling group are readily at hand.

At the base of the political pyramid in these states is the peasantry which forms the great majority of the population and which is still a largely passive element in political life. Potentially, this submerged majority

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majority offers an opportunity for exploitation by some kind of political leadership.

In the changing relations between these groups--specifically between the first and the second--there appear the chief manifestations of political disturbance in several of these countries. Most of that disturbance focuses on questions relating to the treatment of foreign interests. On these questions, the leaders of the urban political groups seek a radical solution: the total elimination of visible foreign power. The ruling group, for its part, often finds it desirable to travel some distance in the same direction, partly because of its own unwillingness or inability to challenge the urban groups directly on this issue. At the same time, because the ruling group is aware that its domestic position could be endangered if xenophobia got out of hand, it seeks with decreasing effectiveness to keep the situation in check at home; it desires compromises radical enough to appease the urban elements but short of the outright eviction of foreign interests. In Iran and Egypt no such compromises have yet been found, and in Iran at least, the moderating elements of the ruling group are almost wholly impotent at present.

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In this internal social conflict, the urban middle group has the advantage of numbers and dynamism. Its leadership is riding the wave of popular sentiments, so far as popular sentiment finds expression in the Arab States. If, however, this leadership is catapulted into power, as has happened in Iran, it must--aside from the elimination of foreign interests--begin largely without a doctrine or a positive political and economic program. It has fattened almost exclusively on its open hostility toward the Western powers and Israel. Since, however, the basic strength of the urban political leadership comes from its command over forces seeking change, the necessity for improvising a program of social and economic change cannot be avoided for long without the risk that another leadership, with a program, will come to the fore. Under some circumstances, this could be communist leadership.

There is growing danger that the process of internal political change going on in these countries may lead to disorder and to a situation in which regimes subject to the influence or control of the Soviet Union could come to power. That disorder is not the necessary outcome of such a process is shown by the case of Turkey, in
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which a somewhat similar change was accomplished in such a way that Turkey has become a strong and valuable ally of the West.

The task is thus not so much to prevent the changes that now impend as to guide them into channels that will offer the least threat to Western interests and the maximum assurance of independent regimes friendly to the West. To this end we should seek to use the social and economic tools available to us in ways that will reduce the explosive power of forces pressing for revolutionary change to the point where necessary changes can be accomplished without uncontrollable instability. This may often mean that we should work with and through the present ruling groups and, while bolstering their hold on power, use our influence to induce them to accommodate themselves as necessary to the new forces that are emerging. As new leadership groups emerge, we should also work to associate their interests with our own and, if and when they gain power, cooperate with them in working out programs that will assist them to attain constructive objectives--a course of development which will tend to give a measure of moderation and stability to their regimes.

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Maximum results, at least in the next several years, will probably be assured by programs directed towards meeting certain aspirations of urban groups, which include both the leadership and principal supporters of the new political movements in this area. In the economic field, however, such programs may often have to be justified mainly on political rather than economic grounds. The greatest economic need in most of these countries is usually for agricultural development, but their aspirations--and, in particular the aspirations of the urban groups--are for industrial development, despite the scarcity of skills and resources necessary to make such development economic.

Provision for agricultural development is economically sound and, in addition, it may be considered politically far-sighted in this area today, for the peasantry, though now politically passive, is not permanently immune to the suggestion that its lot might be greatly improved by a basic reorganization of society. Eventually, ambitious urban leadership groups may realize the advantages to be derived from exploiting this potential source of mass discontent. This in turn
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might some day lead to violent disorder and to the consequent loss of government control over parts of the countryside, which would then offer a firm rural base, as in China, for a militant communist movement. It is desirable to try to anticipate such possible developments through programs designed to improve the lot of the still politically quiescent peasantry.

It is clear that, in developing and carrying out any programs in the area it will be necessary to make compromises between long-term and short-term considerations. In the long-term it is probable that the present ruling groups will lose more of their power--unless they prove able to adjust their outlook and to assume leadership of the changing social and economic and political development of their countries. In the short-term, however, the West depends greatly on these groups in certain countries for the maintenance of stability in the area, and will often find it necessary to work with and through those men and groups who now exercise power, even though it may not be in full sympathy with them and may not expect that they will be able to retain such power over the long run.

The problem of leadership is fundamental. Our principal aim should be to encourage the emergence of
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competent leaders, relatively well-disposed toward the West. As they come to power, we should work as closely with them as the temper of their country will permit and should furnish them whatever aid we usefully can. We must be prepared, however, for the fact that they may not wish or be able to express any overt good will toward, or to seek any explicit association with, the West. The force of nationalism is too strong a motivating element in the process of political change that is now going on in these countries to be disregarded by any leadership which emerges from that process, however competent and responsible it may be. In our own interests we should not be deterred by the xenophobic slogans which that leadership may employ from doing whatever we can to bolster it in power where it appears to offer the best prospect of prolonged, stable, effective, non-communist government.

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